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❖THE❖OLD❖TESTAMENT❖STUDENT.❖

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THERE are some men who *never* have an opinion of their own. Neither they nor those with whom they are associated ever know on which side of a question they stand. In the utterance of an expression of the simplest character they employ a sentence which is full of "perhaps," "probably," "possibly," etc. These men are everywhere, nowhere. There are other men who have clear and decided convictions upon every question which has ever come up, and upon many which are to come up within the next two or three centuries. These men do not wait for the various sides of a question to be presented. This, indeed, would be quite foreign to their idea; for, in their estimation, there is but one side; there *can be* but one side. Time given either to the statement or refutation of the other side is time wasted. There is always danger that the statement of other views than those which they hold will do great injury.

Is there a middle ground which might prove acceptable? Is it possible on certain important questions to maintain not an uncertain, but a neutral position? Is it possible to say in reference to a certain series of facts: *This* explanation removes such and such difficulties, but leaves such and such unsolved; *that* explanation removes some, but leaves still others? Still further, is it possible to take up the discussion of a question and present either or both sides without being the advocate of one or the other? No one will deny that this is the proper spirit with which to pursue an investigation? Does the unprejudiced scholar prosecute an inquiry with mind made up beforehand as to its outcome? If then this attitude, not of indifference, nor of uncertainty, but of neutrality, is that which, as all demand, must characterize investigation, may not the same spirit, perhaps with profit

to all concerned, characterize the presentation of a theory of which the increasing weight of evidence and authority seem almost to compel acceptance, but which, at the same time, the dangerous consequences of its general acceptance would force one to reject.

THE theological seminaries have been held responsible for the ignorance which many ministers exhibit in regard to the Bible. The truth is that the present seminary curriculum is an inheritance from the time when the Bible was quite thoroughly learned by all children in Christian families. The large majority of the students who formerly went to the seminaries had learned in childhood the entire Bible history; they were familiar with many of the Psalms, and with many passages in the New Testament, in fact with a large share of the Bible. The seminary course was designed for such students. Circumstances are now changed. In Christian families there has been a famine, not so much of hearing the gospel preached as of studying the Scripture-records. Young men from Christian families grow up, become Christians, engage in Christian work, enter seminaries, and there evince ignorance of the Bible that is astounding. Fifty years ago a child twelve years of age would have been disgraced by the ignorance that is sometimes shown by a seminary student. Under such circumstances it is not a matter of wonder that the seminary training fails of its object. The old curriculum is no longer adapted. Suppose that upon entrance a student were asked to write in chronological order the names of the following persons: Abraham, Adam, David, Elijah, Isaac, Isaiah, Jacob, Jeremiah, Jesus, John the Baptist, Joshua, Moses, Noah, Paul, Samuel, and state the position and work of each. The large majority of students would fail on several points. Fifty years ago the failures would have been confined to a small minority. If such men are permitted to enter the seminary, and no training in the elements of Bible history is given them, they will graduate with ignorance that is absolutely disgraceful. Hence there is rightly a popular call for more knowledge on the part of ministers. An important question is, Where is the proper place to supply this need? As things now are, it seems necessary for the seminaries to do this. Ought the seminaries to accept the position that this is their permanent work? If they do, will it be taken as a lowering of the standard of their training? More thorough knowledge of the Bible is imperative; but ought it not perhaps to be gained before entering the seminary?

Is it a sufficiently familiar idea, that the Bible was *acted out*, before it was *written out*? that the events described in it took place, in some cases, long before the description given us was recorded? that sacred history antedates sacred Scripture? No one denies this; and, after all, what difference does it make? It may, perhaps, raise some serious questions. Let us consider one or two:—

If the event described took place in one century, and the narrative of it which we have belongs to another century, or to a later period of the same century, evidently allowance must be made for the time which has elapsed. This allowance, if granted, will show itself, perhaps, (1) in the use of a different language, as in the case of Noah's curse which could not have been uttered originally in Hebrew; (2) in the existence of two or more versions (not contradictory but different) of the same event, as in the case of the narratives of the life and words of our Lord, which present some striking differences, although written down before an entire century had passed; (3) in the difference of stand-point from which the event is regarded, as is witnessed by the parallel accounts of the same events furnished in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles; (4) in the fuller statement of a speech, or fuller description of an event, as in the case of the words of the prophet of Judah to Jeroboam (1 Kings 13), the form of which the most conservative commentators concede to belong *to a much later date*, and in still other ways.

BUT the question at once arises: While we may readily grant all this as true of profane writings, how can it possibly be true of *inspired* writings? There is, of course, a difficulty here; but it will not do to restrict ourselves to questions which do not raise difficulties. Let us grant three facts: (1) that these events occurred at a given time; (2) that the narratives describing them were written somewhat later and (3) that the phenomena just alluded to are due to the difference of time which elapsed between the occurrence and the description. Now put side by side with these, the *fourth* fact which is just as much a fact as any or all of the three, that both the occurrence and the description were divinely ordered, divinely inspired. Is there, after all, any real difficulty? Is God to be limited as to the means which he is able to employ in imparting revelation, or in the wisdom which shall lead to make use of this or that particular method? All the points above referred to may not be granted. But, *should* they be, is the difficulty insuperable? By no means; unless we feel obliged to defend that most strict theory of inspiration known as the verbal theory.

STILL another question, less serious and more interesting: If the events took place and their description followed; if David was persecuted by Saul and Psalms grew out of it; if there was great danger from Assyria, and Isaiah's prophecies are based upon it; if there was a captivity, and because of it the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah were delivered, *what follows?* (1) That sacred history in many cases furnished the occasion for the revelation of sacred scripture; (2) that sacred history, to some extent, molded and shaped sacred Scripture; (3) that the more one knows of sacred history the more familiar he is with its details, the better he will understand and appreciate sacred Scripture; (4) that, to put it more strongly, ignorance of sacred history is, likewise, ignorance of sacred Scripture; (5) that, sacred history being understood in its widest sense as including geography, archæology, etc., and sacred Scripture being known to contain frequent allusions to topics in these departments, their study is, in all but the highest sense, study of sacred Scripture; (6) that, to be specific, an intellectual study of the Bible is not a hindrance, but a mighty aid to the comprehension of its spiritual contents and teaching.

THE following communication is one of a number which have recently been received upon the same subject. It is not too much to say that a very large number of Bible students entertain the feeling to which the Rev. Mr. Nordell has here given utterance. We publish the letter with the hope that, as a result of the publication, information may be gained which will aid us to decide whether or not it is, upon the whole, desirable to accede to this request. If there are others who desire this, or if there are any who would object to it, may we not hear from them?

My Dear Professor Harper:

It is conceded among all Bible students that the burning question of our day is the so-called "Pentateuchal Analysis." If it were only a matter of literary criticism touching the nature and origin of the material which the alleged author used or incorporated into his finished work as it lies in our hands, we might let the critics fight it out among themselves and settle it in any fashion they please. But the question is transcendently more important than its mere literary aspects. Its results are so destructive of traditional historical views, so conflicting with current notions of inspiration, and so far-reaching in their consequences, that it is not surprising that they should be received by reverent minds as really subversive of the foundations of the Christian faith. Nevertheless the problem cannot be ignored any longer. Nor can it be decided from *a priori* postulates, however easy and agreeable such procedure might be. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the results are accepted by the practically unan-

imous biblical scholarship of the Continent, and by a large part of the best scholarship in England. Nor can it be permanently satisfactory to any candid mind to be continually fortifying itself in conservative opposition by reading only polemics against it. The fact is that not a few of our young men, impelled by indiscriminating enthusiasm, are adopting just the opposite course in going over to the side of the critics without an adequate or dispassionate survey of the conditions presented by the problem. If the results embody truth, this truth has most likely come to stay, and, however distasteful it may be, we must in some way adjust ourselves to it. If the results present, not truth, but error, we may be sure that after a little transient flutter, it will go the way of all other errors that have sprung up to undermine the authority of the inspired Word. While it is true that the Pentateuchal Analysis in its extreme and most repulsive form is held by rationalists who seek by every means to eliminate from the Scriptures their supernatural element, yet it should not be forgotten that even a thorough-going rationalism has rendered invaluable service to faith.

The above is simply introductory to a suggestion and a request. They grow out of my own not very successful endeavor to present to my eye clearly and graphically the results of the Pentateuchal Analysis, in so far as there is a substantial agreement respecting the documents of which the Pentateuch is composed. Would it not be possible to present in successive issues of *THE OLD TESTAMENT STUDENT* the whole or a part of the translation of the Pentateuch, with the different documents distinguished by different type, so as to present the *alleged facts* clearly to the reader's eye, and perhaps with a few explanatory footnotes? It seems to me that such an arrangement would be of inestimable service to all students of the Bible who desire an independent and intelligent opinion on the merits of the case. Such a service might be rendered more appropriately by *THE OLD TESTAMENT STUDENT* than by any other periodical that I know of, and I doubt not it would be of permanent value to a very large proportion of its readers. This service, it would appear, could be rendered in the interests of a reverent biblical scholarship without in any wise committing *THE OLD TESTAMENT STUDENT* to an advocacy of the critical views—a position I would unhesitatingly deplore.

Sincerely yours,

PHILIP A. NORDELL.

NEW LONDON, CONN., March 17, 1888.